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ABSTRACT

A study described New Mexico Vocational Student Organization (VSO) advisors' educational exposure to, use of, and attitudes toward the Program of Activities (POA), a planning and management tool available to VSO advisors. The population for this descriptive survey study was defined as 296 secondary vocational-technical teachers in grades 9-12 who had VSO advising responsibilities during the 1995-96 school year. A three-part instrument gathered data pertaining to advisors' attitude toward use of a POA, situational information related to use of a POA, and demographic information. The final sample size was 114. Findings were as follow: 60.7 percent of all VSO advisors had never been exposed to a POA; approximately 29 percent reported to have never been a former VSO member; and 57 percent reported having a POA in their chapter. The six factors (in order of rank) that were influential in developing a POA were students, competitive events, personal interests, state mandates, an existing POA, and peers/colleagues. In developing a POA, subjects identified "other teachers" as their primary source of knowledge and generally tended to include standing committees that represented those identified by the National Future Farmers of America organization. VSO advisors tended to have a favorable attitude use of a POA, although there remained a small margin for growth in their attitudes. (Contains 16 references.) (YLB)

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Factors Perceived to Influence the Use of the Program of Activities

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Abstract

A planning and management tool available to the Vocational Student Organization (VSO) advisor is a "program of activities." This study sought to determine the perceived factors that lead to the development and use of a program of activities. The results revealed that of several possible factors, students were identified as the single most influential factor for developing a POA. In developing POA, subjects identified "other teachers" as their primary source of knowledge and generally tend to include standing committees that represent those identified by the National FFA Organization. It was also found that VSO advisors tend to have a favorable attitude toward the use of a POA.

Introduction

A basic responsibility of the vocational-technical education teacher is to integrate the vocational student organization (VSO) into their educational program to "provide students with opportunities to apply learned skills, develop leadership abilities, and gain recognition" (Smith & Edmunds, 1995, p. 29). In doing so, they agree to serve as a VSO chapter advisor.

According to the Center on Education and Training for Employment (1992, p. 3), for vocational-technical education students to experience the full benefits of vocational student organization activities, they "should not only participate in the activities but should be fully involved in selecting the program and planning the work." The role of VSO chapter advisor includes "supervising the development, publication, and implementation of a yearly plan of

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activities" (also known as a program of work, program of activities, or POA) and "supervising a yearly evaluation of the vocational student organization program" (Vaughn, Vaughn, & Vaughn, 1993, p. 11). A comprehensive POA provides for yearly planning, implementing, and evaluating of the VSO program by its members (National FFA Organization, 1995a; Technology Student Association, 1989).

Throughout the literature, there appears to be agreement on the definition of a program of activities (POA). For example, it has been defined by the Center on Education and Training for Employment (1992, p. 7) as "a written plan listing the activities a local VSO chapter plans to accomplish during the year." Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (1991, p. 30) stated "the chapter program of work includes all activities in which members want to be involved." Phipps and Osborne (1988, p. 393) defined it as "an annual written plan of goals and activities to be undertaken by the membership." Vaughn, Vaughn, and Vaughn (1993, p. 40) called it "a written plan, developed and published yearly, of all activities that the chapter/club wishes to accomplish during the school year." The National FFA Organization (1995b, p. 48) defined it simply as "a road map to guide your chapter to its goals each year."

A POA provides many benefits to vocational-technical education students and programs. For example, Dormody and Seevers (1994, p. 42) stated "participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership development activities enables FFA members to do the real work of their chapters and prepare for later life." When VSO members participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA, they are participating in program planning: a process they will use often in future organizational work. According to Newcomb, McCracken, and Warmbrod (1993, p. 32) "students are motivated through their involvement in setting goals and planning learning activities." Students also "learn to solve problems, think critically, and learn from their successes and failures" (Dormody & Seevers, p. 47). Furthermore, higher-order thinking skills like synthesis and evaluation (Miller, 1990) are emphasized in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA.

Smith and Edmunds (1995, p. 1) highlighted "the VSO program of work can be coordinated with classroom and occupational experiences and teaches leadership and the techniques of working with others toward common goals." When members participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the program of activities, they feel more empowerment and ownership for the activities (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, 1991).

Other benefits of well-planned POAs for FFA chapters (Kansas State Department of Education, 1977, p. 517) would apply to all VSOs:

1. They include goals that serve as a means of directing chapter activities in a positive manner.
2. They provide school administration and community with a better understanding of the local chapter.
3. They provide opportunity for members to use and develop skills taught in vocational agriculture.

4. They point out the vital part FFA has in a vocational agriculture department.
5. They are necessary for proper chapter recognition on the local, state, and national level.
6. They represent the combined thinking of a majority of the members and involve each member.

With so many apparent benefits to vocational-technical education students and programs for adopting the POA, it would seem likely that a high percentage of VSO chapters would be using one. In their study of FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, Dormody and Seevers (1994) found that only 23 percent of respondents (n=51) had participated in POA planning and only four respondents indicated that POA planning was one of their top three leadership development activities while in FFA. They recommended that further research be conducted to determine advisor perceptions of the level of POA adoption in FFA chapters and FFA member participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership activities. A review of the literature uncovered no other references to previous vocational-technical education research bearing on these questions. Therefore, the researchers in this study decided to follow-up on the recommendations, but within the broader context of vocational-technical education.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe New Mexico vocational student organization (VSO) advisors' educational exposure to, use of, and attitudes toward the program of activities (POA). Specific objectives were:

1) To describe VSO advisors' exposure to a POA through membership in a VSO as a youth, and their single greatest influence in developing a POA

2) To describe whether or not VSO advisors have a POA; their sources of knowledge used for developing a POA; POA committees adopted; method of convening committees; and student involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating VSO activities through the committee structure

3) To determine VSO advisors' attitudes toward the use of a POA.

Procedures

The population for this descriptive survey study was defined as secondary vocational-technical teachers grades 9-12 in New Mexico who had VSO advising responsibilities during the 1995-96 academic school year (N=296). The frame of teachers was acquired from state supervisors and/or state VSO advisors. Vocational-technical areas represented were: agricultural education, business education, marketing education, family and consumer science, trade and industrial education and technology education. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of sample sizes, a sample size of 170 was identified as representative of a population of 296 within a five percent margin of error.

An instrument was developed by the researchers to gather the data. The instrument contained three sections. Section one was designed to gather data from subjects pertaining to their attitude toward the use a POA in their vocational student organization (objective 4) using a 7-point semantic differential scale. The scale was developed using three of Rogers' (1995) attributes of innovations (relative advantage, complexity, and compatibility) as a conceptual base. It contained 13 bipolar adjective pairs arranged in random fashion. For example, bipolar adjectives related to relative advantage were Important/Unimportant and Desirable/Undesirable. To reduce ambiguity of the term "program of activities," a definition was provided. Section two was designed to gather situational information related to the use of a POA (objectives 2 & 3). And, section three gathered demographic information from subjects (objective 1).

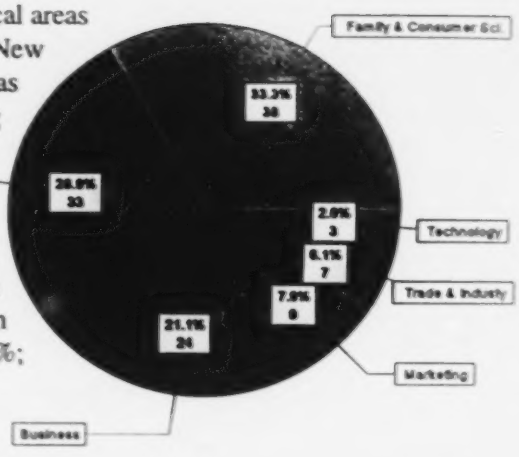
The instrument was submitted to a panel of experts consisting of five persons to determine face and content validity. The panel included three faculty and two graduate students in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at New Mexico State University knowledgeable in instrumentation. Suggestions and comments offered by the panel were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted. The pilot test group consisted of 15 purposefully selected vocational-technical teachers in New Mexico who attended the 1995 state Vocational-Technical and Adult Education Conference. Because of the nature of the questions, subjects were given two administrations of the same instrument to calculate a test-retest reliability estimate on non-demographic items. An average of 92.5 percent test-retest agreement on non-demographic data was attained with individual items ranging from 80.5 to 100. Using data from the first administration, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for establishing the reliability on the semantic differential scale. The resultant reliability estimate was a Cronbach's alpha of .79.

Data were collected in Spring 1996. Subjects were sent a package containing a cover letter, questionnaire, and a postage paid, self-addressed envelope. After follow-up efforts, a response rate of 67 percent (n=114) was achieved. To address non-response error, a sample of the non-respondents was compared to the sample of respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). No significant ($p>.05$) differences were found to exist between the sample of non-respondents and the sample of respondents on the three variables. Thus, the non-respondent data (n=8) were pooled with the respondent data (n=114) yielding a sample size of 114 (67%) allowing generalizing to the population (Miller & Smith, 1983).

Results

VSO advisors represented six vocational-technical areas (Figure 1). Of the 114 VSO advisors in New Mexico, the largest vocational-technical area was Family and Consumer Science comprising approximately 33 percent (n=38). Agricultural Education comprised the second largest vocational-technical area (26.9%; n=33); followed by Business Education (21.1%; n=24), Marketing Education (7.9%; n=9), Trade and Industrial Education (6.1; n=7), and Technology Education (2.6%; n=3).



The average age of a VSO advisor was 42.4 years (sd=8.66) with approximately 13 years (sd=8.22) of teaching experience (Table 1). The average number of years teachers served as an advisor to a VSO was approximately 11 (sd=8.07). Approximately 57 percent (n=65) of the VSO advisors were female and the remaining 43 percent (n=49) were male (Table 1).

Table 1. VSO Advisors' Characteristics (n=114)

Characteristics	Mean	Std. Dev.	Frequency	Percent
Years of teaching	13.1	8.22		
Years advising VSOs	10.9	8.07		
Age	42.4	8.66		
Gender				
Female			65	57
Male			49	43
Total			114	100

VSO advisors were asked if they had ever been exposed to a POA as a former VSO member (Figure 2). Approximately 31.1 percent (n=38) of the VSO advisors indicated YES. Those remaining responded either NO (32%; n=39) or that they had never been a VSO member (28.7%; n=35). Two VSO advisors chose to not to respond to this item. Of the 114 VSO advisors, approximately 57 percent (n=70) indicated they used a POA in planning activities for their VSO. In identifying VSO

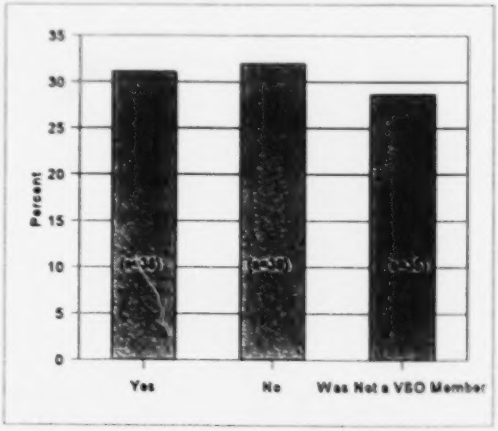


Figure 2. VSO Advisors' Exposure to POA as a VSO Member

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advisors' greatest influence for developing a POA, several factors were available for them to select. Advisors were asked to identify only one of the given factors for being the greatest influence on them.

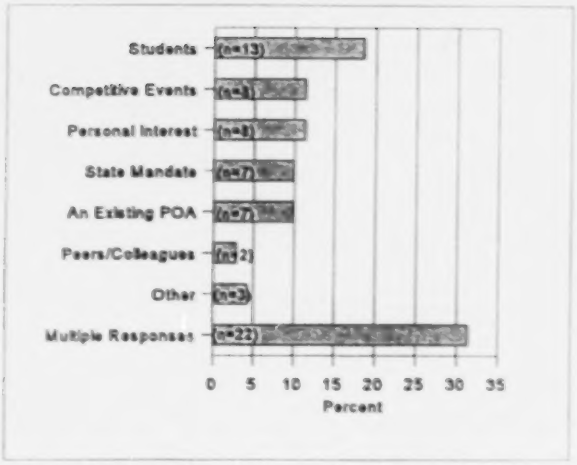

Figure 3. Influential Factors in Developing a POA

Of the 70 VSO advisors who reported having a POA, the most common mentioned influence for developing a POA was students (18.9%; n=13) (Figure 3). Other influential factors were competitive events (11.4%; n=8), personal interest (11.4%; n=8), state mandate (10.0%; n=7), an existing POA (10.0%; n=7), and peers and/or colleagues (2.9%; n=2). Three VSO advisors (4.3%) identified other factors having the greatest influence on them for developing a POA. Approximately 31 percent (n=22) of the VSO advisors identified more than one factor as having the greatest influence on them in developing a POA.

Figure 4 highlights the sources of knowledge VSO advisors used in constructing a POA. The most frequently reported source of knowledge for constructing a POA was other vocational teachers (31%; n=35). Aside from the "other" response category, pre-service education (12.4%; n=14) was the source of knowledge that was least identified. Written material (18.6%; n=21), in-service education (17.7%; n=20), and having been a VSO member as a youth (17.7%; n=20) also served as sources of knowledge to VSO advisors. Additionally, thirty percent (n=43) of the respondents indicated they had no knowledge in developing a POA.

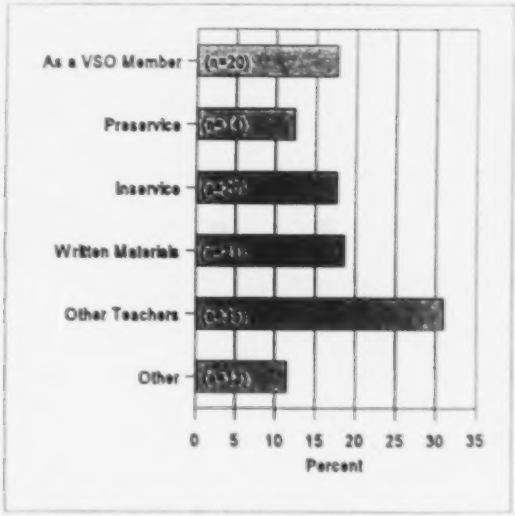

Figure 4. Sources of Knowledge in Developing a POA

Similarly, of the VSO advisors who reported using a POA in their VSO, Community Service (77.1%; n=54) was identified as the standing committee most frequently used (Figure 5). In contrast, the POA standing committee least used was Alumni Relations (35.7%; n=25). Other POA standing committees used were State and National Activities (77.1%; n=49),

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Earning and Savings (65.7%; n=46), Leadership (64.3%; n=45), Conduct of Meetings (61.4%; n=43), Public Relations (57.1%; n=40), Recreation (52.9%; n=37), Occupational Experience Programs (47.1%; n=33), Banquet (45.7%; n=32), Cooperation (41.4%; n=29), and Scholarship (38.6%; n=27). A few (17.1%; n=12) VSO advisors reported having other standing committees.

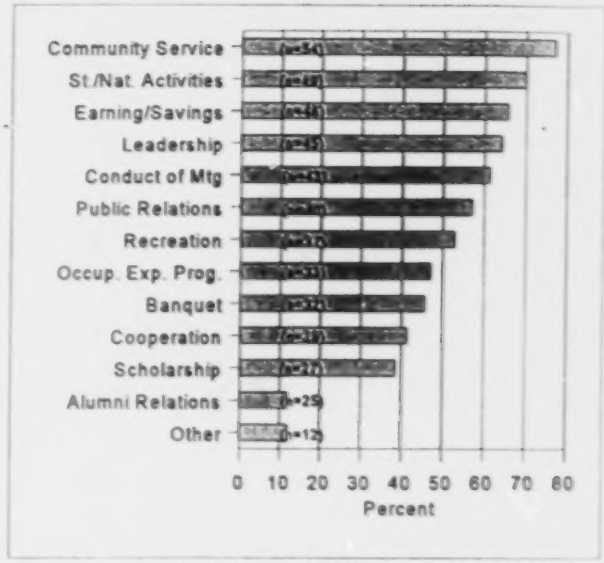

Figure 5. Use of POA Standing Committee

VSO advisors were asked to identify the time(s) in which they convened POA standing committee meetings (Figure 6). Again, of the VSO advisors who used a POA in their VSO (n=70), approximately 54.3 percent (n=38) indicated that they convene meetings during class. Additionally, approximately 47 percent (n=33) indicated they convene meetings during lunch; 31.4 percent (n=22) indicated they met during the chapter meeting; 30 percent (n=21) after-school; and 15.7 percent (n=11) reported meeting prior to the chapter meeting. Approximately 14 percent (n=10) indicated they met at some other time.

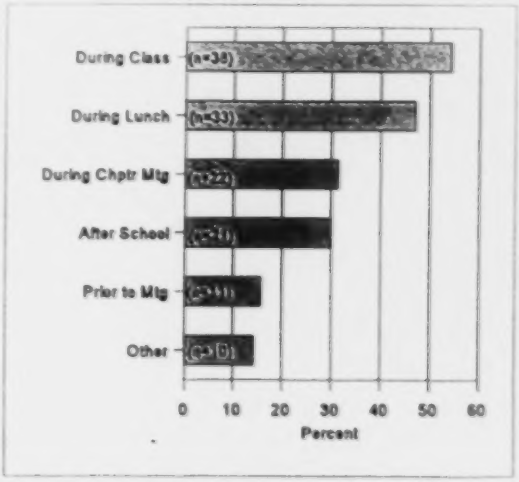

Figure 6. Methods for Convening POA Committees

In determining student participation in developing a POA, VSO advisors were asked to indicate whether or not their students were involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of committee activities (Figure 7). Approximately 98 percent (n=69) of the VSO advisors reported that their students were involved in planning with an equal percentage (98.5%) involved in implementing the POA. However, approximately 80 percent of the VSO advisors indicated that their students were involved in the evaluation of activities related to POA committees.

Thirteen paired bipolar expressions were used to assess VSO advisors' attitude toward POA use. POA was defined as a written plan, developed and published yearly, of all activities that

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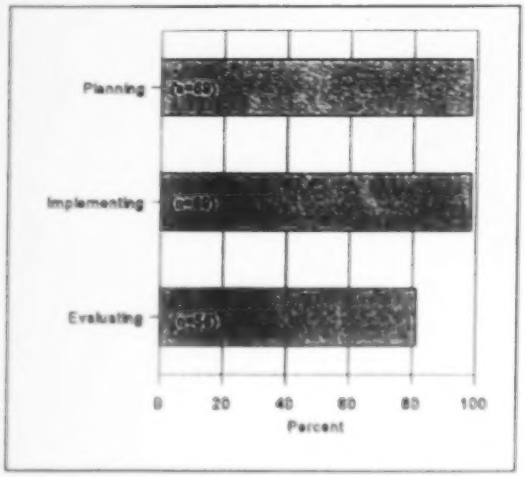

Figure 7. Student Participation in Developing a POA

the VSO wishes to accomplish during the school year. A POA includes a list of standing committees and their associated goal(s), along with the ways and means for accomplishing those goals (Vaughn, Vaughn, & Vaughn, 1993).

A mean of 4.94 represents the VSO advisors' attitude regarding POA use within a VSO (Table 2). This mean score is based on a seven-point rating scale with seven being most favorable. The standard deviation was .91 with individual mean scores ranging from 2.62 to 6.77.

Table 2 VSO Advisors' Attitude Toward the Use of a POA (n=114)

Construct	Mean	Std Dev.	Range
Attitude	4.94	.91	2.62-6.77

Note. Scale based on: 1=unfavorable to 7=most favorable

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data it was concluded that vocational-technical education teachers in New Mexico can be represented as having approximately 13 years of teaching experience and approximately 11 years of VSO advising experience. The average age was approximately 42 with the majority (57%) of VSO advisors being female. In addition, the majority (60.7%) of all VSO advisors had never been exposed to a POA and approximately 29 percent reported to have never been a former VSO member.

The majority (57%) of the VSO advisors reported having a POA in their chapter. Of the 11 potential single greatest influence factors for developing a POA that were available for VSO advisors to identify, one half of them were solely identified. The six factors (in order of rank) were students, competitive events, personal interests, state mandates, an existing POA, and peers/colleagues. Factors that were not solely identified by VSO advisors were student-teaching experience, pre-service course work, in-service programs, commercial POA packages, and the availability of a word processor. Accordingly then, it is recommended that

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persons desiring to promote the use of a POA for VSO chapter operations consider marketing to VSO advisors the need of a POA from the students' perspective, communicate the benefits gained from developing a POA through competitive events and personal satisfaction, and provide them with sample model POAs from their state. It is further recommended that pre-service and in-service education on developing a POA be added or enhanced.

It was concluded that other teachers were the greatest source of knowledge for developing a POA. Written materials, experience as a former VSO member, and pre-service and in-service education were also cited as sources of knowledge for develop a POA. Hence, it is recommended that individuals interested in promoting the use of a POA facilitate networking activities for VSO advisors and promote the use of other teachers as a key source of knowledge and experience for developing a POA. Furthermore, efforts should be made to tap into VSO advisors experiences as a former VSO member in communicating the relative advantages of a POA. Pre-service and in-service education should be strengthened to teach pre-service teachers and current VSO advisors the philosophy and guidelines for developing a POA. Written materials for developing a POA should be disseminated during these educational programs and made available through teacher education units and the state department of education.

VSO advisors adopted the standing committees outlined by the National FFA Organization (1984). The most frequently cited committee was community service, whereas the least identified committee was alumni relations. VSO advisors should be encouraged to adopt a committee structure that is compatible with members' interests and needs, chapter and community needs, and the size of the chapter.

The most frequently cited time for convening POA committee meetings was during class followed by meeting during lunch. This conclusion might suggest that convenience in scheduling is important in arranging for committee meetings. Meeting during class and lunch period allow for optimal member participation. Thus, it is recommended that VSO advisors utilize time during class and the lunch period to convene committee meeting in addressing activities related to the chapter POA. If VSO advisors choose to meet during class, it would require them to structure POA committees by class. In doing so, advisors should consider the maturity and experience of members when assigning committees to classes. Should advisors choose to convene committee meetings during the lunch period, committee structuring may allow for more flexibility for committee membership composition. Other recommended times for convening POA committee meetings include during chapter meetings, after school, and prior to chapter meetings.

VSO advisors reported that nearly all (98.5%) of their members participate in planning and implementing VSO activities related to POA committees. Approximately 80 percent, however, are involved in evaluating committee activities. This would suggest that while members are involved in planning and implementing of committee activities, some are not

given an opportunity or they are not taking the advantage of the opportunity to evaluate and make judgements of committee activities. It is therefore recommended that pre-service and in-service education, and state department of education communicate the importance of involving members in evaluating POA committee activities as part of pre-service and in-service programs. Through these experiences VSO members can engage in the complete program planning process, capitalize on successes and failures, and utilize higher-order thinking skills for improving the benefits to members, the chapter, and the community gained through a POA. Finally, advisors need to ensure that members understand their role and responsibilities for the POA. Similarly, members need to spend time on the POA throughout the school year. Committee meetings for updating activities should be held regularly to ensure committee success.

Regarding VSO advisors' attitude toward the use of a POA, it was concluded that they have a moderately (mean=4.94) favorable attitude. Based on a 7-point scale, where 7 is favorable, there remains a small margin for growth in VSO advisors' attitudes. Thus, attitudes should be strengthened through in-service and pre-service education. Using these modes of delivery, presenters should attempt to reduce the perceived complexity and increase the relative advantage and compatibility for using a POA to guide VSO activities.

A recommendation for future research is to obtain actual written POAs from VSO advisors and analyze them for comprehensiveness, member participation, and committee structure, among other elements.

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